

CLAIMS

Therefore, having thus described the invention, at least the following is claimed:

- 1 1. A system for managing accounts within a network community,
2 comprising:
 - 3 an account server to manage a plurality of direct accounts for a plurality of
4 resident users of the network community and at least one guest account for at least one
5 guest of a respective resident user;
 - 6 a client of a respective resident user of the network community configured to
7 send to a non-resident user of the network community an invitation to become the
8 guest of the respective resident user, wherein the account server is configured to create
9 a guest account for the non-resident user after the sending of the invitation.
- 1 2. The system of claim 1, the account server configured to:
 - 2 receive an answer to the invitation from the non-resident user;
 - 3 activate the guest account of the non-resident user if the answer to the
4 invitation is an acceptance of the invitation; and
 - 5 delete the guest account of the non-resident user if the answer to the invitation
6 is a declination of the invitation, wherein the invitation contains identification
7 information about the non-resident user that is used to setup the guest account of the
8 non-resident user and the invitation provides a mechanism for answering the
9 invitation.
- 1 3. The system of claim 1, wherein the invitation is an email message.
- 1 4. The system of claim 1, wherein the invitation is an instant message.

1 5. The system of claim 1, wherein a respective guest account contains a
2 data field to specify an end-date for canceling the respective guest account, the
3 account server configured to:

4 after occurrence of the end-date, offer a respective guest associated with the
5 respective guest account an opportunity to convert the respective guest account into a
6 new direct account;

7 schedule a cancellation date of the at least one guest account after receiving a
8 request to cancel a respective direct account of the respective resident user sponsoring
9 the at least one guest account;

10 schedule a cancellation date of the at least one guest account after receiving a
11 request, from the respective resident user sponsoring the at least one guest account, to
12 cancel the at least one guest account of the at least one guest; and

13 schedule a cancellation date of the at least one guest account after receiving a
14 request, from the at least one guest associated with the at least one guest account, to
15 cancel the at least one guest account.

1 6. The system of claim 5, wherein the request to cancel the at least one
2 guest account is generated by an act of removing the at least one guest associated with
3 the at least guest account from a roster list of the respective resident user.

1 7. The system of claim 5, wherein the request to cancel the at least one
2 guest account is generated by an act of removing the respective resident user from a
3 roster list of the at least one guest.

1 8. The system of claim 1, wherein members of the network community
2 utilize a common network service, the members of the network community
3 comprising the plurality of resident users and guests of the plurality of resident users.

1 9. The system of claim 8, wherein the network service is an Internet
2 application.

1 10. A system for managing accounts within a network community,
2 comprising:

3 means for sending an invitation to a non-resident user to become a guest of a
4 resident user;

5 means for managing a direct account of the resident user of the network
6 community and a guest account of the guest user of the network community, the guest
7 account sponsored by the resident user;

8 means for creating the guest account after sending the invitation to the non-
9 resident user; and

10 means for setting up the guest account with identification information
11 contained in the invitation about the non-resident user.

1 11. The system of claim 10, further comprising:

2 means for answering the invitation;
3 means for activating the guest account if the answer to the invitation is an
4 acceptance of the invitation; and

5 means for deleting the guest account if the answer to the invitation is a
6 declination of the invitation.

1 12. The system of claim 10, further comprising:

2 means for specifying an end-date for canceling the guest account;

3 means for, after occurrence of the end-date, offering the guest user an
4 opportunity to convert the guest account into a new direct account;

5 means for, after receiving an acceptance to the invitation by the non-resident
6 user, determining if the resident user has an available guest slot; and

7 means for activating the guest account if there is an available guest slot.

1 13. The system of claim 10, further comprising:
2 means for scheduling a cancellation date of the guest account after receiving a
3 request to cancel the direct account of the resident user who is sponsoring the guest
4 account;

5 means for scheduling a cancellation date of the guest account after receiving a
6 request, from the resident user sponsoring the guest account, to cancel the guest
7 account of the guest user; and

8 means for scheduling a cancellation date of the guest account after receiving a
9 request, from the guest user, to cancel the guest account of the guest user.

1 14. A method for managing accounts within a network community,
2 comprising the steps of:

3 managing a direct account of the resident user and a guest account of a guest
4 of the resident user;
5 sending an invitation to a non-resident user of the network community to
6 become a guest of a resident user of the network community, wherein identification
7 information about the non-resident user is provided to generate the invitation; and
1 creating a new guest account for the non-resident user after sending the
2 invitation to the non-resident user, wherein the identification information is utilized to
3 setup the new guest account.

1 15. The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:
2 specifying an end-date for canceling the guest account, wherein the end-date is
3 stored in a data field contained in the guest account; and
4 after occurrence of the end-date, offering the guest an opportunity to convert
5 the guest account into a new direct account:

1 16. The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:
2 after receiving an acceptance to the invitation by the non-resident user,
3 determining if the resident user has an available guest slot; and
4 activating the new guest account if there is an available guest slot.

1 17. The method of claim 14, further comprising the step of:
2 receiving an answer to the invitation;
3 deleting the new guest account if the answer to the invitation is a declination
4 of the invitation; and

5 activating the new guest account if the answer to the invitation is an
6 acceptance of the invitation.

1 18. The method of claim 14, further comprising the steps of:
2 after detecting an act of removing the guest from a roster list of the resident
3 user, scheduling a cancellation date of the guest account; and
4 after detecting an act of removing the resident user from a roster list of the
5 guest, scheduling a cancellation date of the guest account.

1 19. The method of claim 14, wherein members of the network community
2 utilize a common network service, the members of the network community
3 comprising resident users and guests of the resident users.

1 20. The method of claim 19, wherein the common network service is an
2 instant messaging service.